

German Literature in Bessarabia 01—Introduction

Source: *Deutscher Volkskalender für Bessarabien – 1935*
Tarutino

Press and Printed by *Deutschen Zeitung Bessarabiens*
Page 101-105

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December, 2022

Source Location: <http://bit.ly/21v8IWY>
Under 1935 click — <urn:nbn:de:bvb:355-ubr13931-9>
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The 1935 issue of the *Deutscher Volkskalender für Bessarabien*, among other articles, features a lengthy section on some of the literature by Germans in Bessarabia. This first translation focuses on an introduction to the first newspapers that got started among the Bessarabian Germans. As long as I am able to, I will try to continue to translate the work of each of the authors featured in the following parts:

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[Note: Comments in square brackets in the document are those of the translator.]

[Translation Begins]

German Literature in Bessarabia

Introduction by Karl Liebram the Younger

On a stormy evening, I look at an old house—a house that has survived several generations of our villagers. It has a large reed roof (*Rohrdach*), tiny windows and low walls. The dark reed roof seems to want to hide it from the view of all strangers. Today, this roof is adorned with a tile ridge at the top, the reed has also become lighter, it has only recently been flattened out again.

I stood in front of this building, it was storming and raining. Lightning lights up the night, and the rolling of thunder, sometimes near sometimes far away, showed that forces are also at work outside the human spheres. I looked at the house—for a long time—the wind was raging, but it could not harm the old building! No window rattled, no door slammed; for the old roof did not let the wind reach the walls; the dark mass of the reed did not move at all, lay there silent and boring. Only above the four rows of tiles that formed the ridge lit up brightly with every bolt of lightning. It was precisely these that the storm had targeted. A strong gust of wind -- -- -- some of the tile were gone, the storm had taken them with it, had thrown them on the pavement, -- -- -- they were shattered.

I felt cold. My coat was already completely soaked. I went home, but strangely not quickly, as one does on similar occasions. I thought about what I saw: how the old reed roof withstood the storm and how the four rows of tiles were defeated in the battle with the storm. It hurt me inwardly, as a young person you also belong to the new, should you be able to offer just as weak a resistance against the hostile forces as these new tile?

When I got home, I had thought this thing through: the tiles did not fit into the whole, so they broke. So even man who is not rooted in the tradition of his people will also be smashed by a storm wind—and it is sure to come.

The German people in Bessarabia also have a tradition, a past, although it only resembles the old house with the gray reed roof, but it is still there! It has become over the years, rough and hard, just as the life of the ancestors has been.

We need not be ashamed of them; for there is a peculiar charm in this building—the charm of abandonment, of hard work, the charm of strength and clumsiness, but above all the charm of permanence.

Does this picture not fit our German-Bessarabian literature? Many will probably shrug their shoulders at us, many will probably also have a pitying smile about the beginnings of our literature, because it is still very poor compared to that of other German settlement areas. But there is one thing they will not be able to deny—the charm of this wildly prolific, rough and isolated German literature.

It sounds in our native poetry, despite the great emptiness that surrounds us, the longing, also around our solitary German farmhouse, with the large reed roof, to lay a glow of beauty, a glow of contemplation, perhaps also a glow of happiness. Therefore, young heart, be proud of that stormy night, it shows you that your house is being worked on, that life pulsates in it, a life that will be able to do much even during the most determined storm.

Friedrich Fiechtner, from Gnadental, reflects in his poem *Clouds* this longing for sunny heights, it is also our commitment and our aspiration:

Clouds

*Restless up from the sea
ascend to heaven
new clouds without rest.
What destination are you flying towards?
We hardly know,
but we are moving forward
and we climb up
according to the Master's words,
which called us.*

*You also take me along
to pure heights!
You let me stand!
Don't you care about my need?
.
You yourself must strive upwards,
let us give you this teaching
from the clouds for life;
silence is like death.*

Yesterday

Historical Review

Just like the history of the Germans in Bessarabia, the German-Bessarabian literature must also be brought in two parts. Although there is continuity between the two periods 1814-1918 and 1918 until today, the conditions under which it has developed have been quite different. In the Russian period, in the time of the absolutist tsarist government, which did not want to have a minority effort and separate organization, which also did not tolerate free political attitudes and neglected even culture and intellectual work, there was of course little to think of a literature in the German nationalist sense. Thus, the first newspaper in German could only be published in the forties of the last century for the German colonists of Russia. Although the *St. Petersburg Zeitung* had existed since 1725, it had almost no relations with the South. In the Russian period, one cannot speak of a special Germanness in Bessarabia; after all, our Germans only came to its popular consciousness from the moment when the communist revolution broke over vast Russia, and the small Bessarabia had found its old mother again in Greater Romania. Only then, when we had detached ourselves from the protectorate of Odessa, did the time of internal construction, indeed one can say, the time of the founding of a new national community, begin for us: German Bessarabia. Before 1918, we formed a small part of the colonist people in Great Russia, if one wanted to have a subdivision, then [it was] limited to "Black Sea Germans". As such, the Bessarabians also took part in the literature of the Black Sea Germans, of course only as receivers.

The first German-language newspaper was the *Unterhaltungsblatt für die deutschen Ansiedler Rußlands* [Support Page for the German Settlers of Russia], published by the Welfare Committee in

Odessa under the editorship of Sonderregger, which appeared once a month and, as the title suggests, dealt mainly with support material. This page, however, had little local [information], little that corresponded to the individuality of the Black Sea Germans. So its duration was not too long: 1840 to 1863.

Only in 1863 can one speak of the colonists having their own journalism from Southern Russia, thus also from Bessarabia. In this year, the printing house of the Nitzsche brothers and Kisik in Odessa published the *Odessaer Zeitung* [Odessa Newspaper], which was soon transformed into a daily paper. It dealt mainly with agricultural issues, but brought not only news from the individual communities but also political events of the day. Under the direction of Privy Councilor Karl Wilhelm, a native Bessarabian (born 27 Jan. 1849, in Lichtental, Bessarabia, died 06 Feb. 1929, in Bern, Switzerland), the newspaper was significantly expanded and received successively the following supplements: *Landwirtschaftliche Beilage* [Agricultural Supplement]; *Unterhaltungsbeilage* [Support Supplement]; *Illustrierte Beilage* [Illustrated Supplement] and *Ratgeber für Feld und Haus* [Guide for Field and House]. As a publication of German interests, it was also the most widely read newspaper in Bessarabia and the rest of Southern Russia. If you want to get to know the history of our people, you will find a faithful reflection of the development of our colonies, of the development of our school, our church and economy in the years 1868 to 1918 in the *Odessaer Zeitung*. The most important Bessarabian contributors were: Central School teacher Friedr. Fiechtner, Sarata; teacher Wilhelm Mutschall, Tarutino; sexton-teacher Alfred Neumann, Tarutino; teacher Johann Schaupp, Beresina; teacher Georg Schreiber, Lichtental; winegrower August Stephan, Teplitz; teacher Mrs. Strohmaier, Akkerman; teacher Ferdinand Wagner, Gnadental and then the chief editor Karl Wilhelm, as well as his daughter Marie Wilhelm. In addition to this daily newspaper, the religious magazine *Christlicher Volksbote für die evangelisch-lutherischen Gemeinden in Südrußland* [Christian People's Messenger for the Evangelical Lutheran Congregations in Southern Russia] produced by the Nitzsche printing house was read in many copies. Initially, the editor of this weekly paper was Pastor G. Becker; later, Provost Alber (born 1845 in Nikolajew, died 1932 in Pfullingen, Württemberg) took over the editorship of Pastor Daniel Steinwand.

Already during the war, when the German-harassing began throughout Russia, the German-language newspapers could only prolong their existence with difficulty. In the time of the revolution, they disappeared completely. In Romania, the newspaper industry was not yet old, in Muntenia it dates from 1823, when Heliade Rădulescu published his *Curierul Românesc*, in the Moldau it dates only from the *Albina* of Gheorghe Asachi's (1829). With the end of the World War, the Germans of Bessarabia had to organize themselves; had to create for themselves a mouthpiece for nationalist concerns. As soon as the People's Council and the Consistory were founded, 6 teachers of the Tarutino German Boys' Grammar School (senior pastor Daniel Haase, director Heinrich Roemmich, Karl Liebraum, Christian Kalmbach, Albert Knauer and Woldemar v. Gromann) joined together to form the association for the publication of the *Deutsche Zeitung Bessarabiens* [German Newspaper Bessarabia] in Tarutino. The newspaper appeared for the first time on 06 Nov. 1919. The first editor was Professor Christian Kalmbach, after him, for a shorter time, Prof. Albert Knauer, since 1921 until today it is Prof. Karl Liebram. Initially, the newspaper, which appeared only once a week, was produced in a private printing house. However, after it [the printing house] could be purchased in 1920, the *Deutsche Zeitung Bessarabiens* appears every Wednesday and Saturday at 12 columns strong. The funds, 60,000

rubles, for the purchase of the printing house have been borrowed, but have already been paid off. Temporarily, the *Deutsche Zeitung Bessarabiens* had the following supplements: *Unsere Schule* [Our School], *Landwirtschaftliche Blätter* [Agricultural Sheets] and *Kirchliche Blätter* [Church Sheets]. Since 16 July 1932, the *Dobrudscha-Nachrichten* [Dobrudscha News] was published as a supplement. Editor of this bi-monthly supplement was Pastor Herbert Hahn of Cobadin. The *Deutsche Zeitung Bessarabiens* were delivered to Dobrudscha in a circulation of 185 copies. However, it came to an end as a result of financial difficulties: last issue on 27 June 1934. Since 1932, the following existed in Sarata: *Bessarabischer Beobachter* [Bessarabian Observer], founded by the Cultural Society of Sarata called *Der gute Kamerad* [The Good Comrade]; also *Der Museumsverein* [The Museum Society]; as well as a branch of the *Landwirtschaftlicher Verein Kolonist* [Colonist Agricultural Association]; the Sarata *Selbsthilfe* [Self-Help], *Der Deutsch-Bessarabische Lehrerverband* [German-Bessarabian Teacher Association] and the *Verband deutscher Kulturvereine Bessarabiens* [Association of Cultural Societies of Bessarabia]. In October 1933, the *Verband deutscher Kulturvereine* was taken over by the *Selbsthilfe* and converted into a combat magazine of the N.E.D.R. [Nationale Erneuerungsbewegung der Deutschen von Rumänien = National Renewal Movement of the Germans of Romania]. It was published every 2 weeks with 1,000 copies and originally printed by a Russian printing house in Akkerman. Publisher was Prof. Theodor Schöch, Sarata; editor was Arnold Hobbacher, Sarata. In December 1933, the *Bessarabischer Beobachter* published as a supplement the magazine of the German youth organization *Jugend*. It was overseen by the leader of the Bessarabian youth movement, lawyer Arthur Fink. From 25 January, 1934 on, the newspaper was printed weekly by the *Deutsche Zeitung Bessarabiens* (editor Dr. Jak. Fuchs, later Karl Hahn); the *Jugend* did not appear from then on. Last issue of the *Bessarabische Beobachter* was on 04 August, 1934. For a while there was a Romanian-Russian paper in Akkerman with German columns: *Viata Nouă* [New Life], but since the same did not stand up for German interests, it died all too soon, proof of how faithfully and firmly the German people here in the southeast corner clung to their Germanness and their church.

The calendar has always been a dear guest for the German colonist house, as it contains the addresses of all communities as well as to determine beforehand the weather in the coming year. Already in Russian times, the person in Bessarabia had “his” calendar together with all Black Sea Germans. It was the *Neuer Haus und Landwirtschaftskalender für deutsche Ansiedler im südlichen Rußland* [New House and Agricultural Calendar for German Settlers in Southern Russia] published by the *Odessaer Zeitung*. Printed also in the Nitzsche printing house, it endured for 50 years—1868-1918. In addition to instructive essays on agriculture and cattle breeding, this calendar was particularly distinguished by the accurate statistical material on all German municipalities in southern Russia. The “calendar” of the Institution of Mercy “Eben-Ezer” (established in 1871) in Talofka, Saratow-Guv., where also the monthly magazine *Friedensbote* [Herald of Peace] was founded in 1884 and the weekly magazine: *Der Jugendfreund* [Friend of the Youth] (founded by Pastor S. Bonwetsch and Pastor Th. Hölz.). After the annexation of Bessarabia to Romania, its direct successor was the *Deutsche Volkskalender für Bessarabien* [German People's Calendar for Bessarabia], published by the *Deutsche Zeitung Bessarabiens*. In 1922, on the occasion of the centenary of the municipality of Sarata, the German bookseller Albert Knauer published the *Heimatkalender* [Homeland Calendar]. The same has already appeared three more times, in 1925, 1932 and 1933.

These would be the bare numbers and data around which our literature has wound up to brighter heights. In addition to the history of newspapers and calendars, which certainly represent the cornerstones of our German literature, there are also some books to be mentioned that have grown out of the striving to convey to the wider world around us our struggle for a new homeland and old, paternal language. The book by Kludt *Die deutschen Kolonien in Bessarabien* [The German Colonies in Bessarabia]; *Unsere Kolonien* [Our Colonies] by Alexander Klaus, and *Die deutschen Kolonien im Schwarzmeergebiet* [The German Colonies in the Black Sea Region] by Edmund Schmid are purely historical representations of our past, but also poetic works outgrew our cloud at that time, such as *Der viel träumende Kolonist* [The Much Dreaming Colonist] by Gottfried Höger. The beginning was a difficult, a thorny one, at first it was slow, later much faster.

Today

And now let the representatives of the German-Bessarabian literature themselves speak to the readership. We have already grown fond of them, as we all know them from their contributions to newspapers and yearbooks. We want to lead off with a poem by Christian Idler:

Poet

*Into a cold, damp world,
You are positioned from here as light,
A divine fire in the chest
Causes you suffering, joy and pleasure.*

*A stranger in the world you are
And never find rest nor calm,
Where not shaping your power
And creates poetry individuality.*

*And through your restless life
How storm wind blows through the high forest,
A hot longing unsatisfied,
To produce God's image.*

*Inspire for your ideal
You should, which in damp agony of earth
Pass there, without comfort and light,
Until divine light breaks in there too.*

Before we now pass to the actual writers, a few words about those who have collaborated to record the historical development of our people and to record it in purely historical works.

The deeper and deeper engagement with history on the part of teachers, sextons, secretary/clerks and even the farmers is certainly the most important moment in the foundation of a special literature. In the already published 16 volumes of the German national calendar for Bessarabia, 17 Bessarabian and three Dobrudscha chronicles have been printed. This activity of researching its history is one of the most important things in the building up of a people; a people without history, without tradition, is just as unthinkable as a cloud without a future. That is the difference between person and people, the former has only one presence in the world, the latter also a past and a future.

The chronicles published in the calendar are: Sarata by Wilhelm Mutschall—1922, Wittenberg by Dr. A. Necker—1923, Alt-Postal by Martin Weiß—1925, Kischinev by Erich Beuerle—1925, Alt-Elft by Emil Witt—1926, Seimeny by Johann Mayer—1927, Leipzig by Gotthilf Aldinger—1928, Katzbach by Arnold Winger—1929, Gnadental by Friedrich Rüb—1930, Beresina by

Michael Bork—1930, Arzis by Albert Witt—1931, Kurudschika by Edmund Damer and Daniel Erdmann—1931, Alexanderfeld by Wilhelm Chr. Wagner—1931, Eigenfeld by Wilhelm Schöch—1932, Kulm by David Treichel—1932, Schimkke-Weiler by Theodor Wagner—1933, Teplitz by Herbert Weiß—1934, Annowka by Robert Brenner—1934, Lichtental by Georg Schreiber—1935, Hoffnungsfeld by Karl Balmer—1935. In addition, there is the essay *Das Deutschtum im Norden Bessarabiens* [Germanness in North Bessarabia], by the pen of Rudolf Zeller—1927.

If we do not want to dwell on these small village chronicles, the Bessarabian German literature has also created four large chronicles: Alt-Posttal by Martin Weiß, Gnadental by Friedrich Rüb, Teplitz by Herbert Weiß, and Tarutino by Wilhelm Mutschall; the latter is to come out soon.

The history of the Three German Middle Schools in Bessarabia is also already printed: *Geschichte der russische Werner-Zentral-Schule zu Sarata* [History of the Russian Werner Central School at Sarata] from 25 June 1844 to 25 June 1894 by Wilhelm Mutschall, printed in Russian and German in the A. Schulze printing house, Odessa; *Geschichte des Tarutinoer Mädchenlyzeums* [History of the Tarutino Girls' Secondary School] by Wilhelm Mutschall—1931, and the *Geschichte des evang. German Boys' High School in Tarutino* [History of the Evangelical German Boys' Secondary School] by Prof. Dr. Fuchs—1933, both produced in the printing house of the *Deutsche Zeitung Bessarabiens*.

After these brief introductory remarks, the representatives of our German literature will now have their say. In colorful succession, as chance plays their pages into the hands of the calendar man, they will now introduce themselves to the friendly reader and submit samples of their work to him.

[Translation Ends]